

Testimony of Ginger Nichols, Certified Genetic Counselor
RE: SB 370 AN ACT CONCERNING SERVICES PROVIDED BY GENETIC COUNSELORS
before the
Public Health Committee
March 16, 2012

Senator Gerratana, Representative Ritter, Senator Welch, Representative Perillo, distinguished members of the Public Health committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today regarding **Senate Bill 370: An Act Concerning Services Provided by Genetic Counselors**. My name is Ginger Nichols. I am from Newtown, CT. I am a Board Certified Genetic Counselor, and I have been working as a genetic counselor at the University of Connecticut Health Center for more than 11 years.

I would like to start by offering my sincere thanks to the chairs and public health committee members for giving me the opportunity to speak here today, and for recognizing the importance of genetic counseling as a profession. As you may know, genetic counselors are healthcare practitioners with significant training and expertise in genetics and counseling, obtained through a rigorous 2 year master's level program. While genetic education is included as a single class or course in some other health care training programs, only master's level genetic counselors focus on coursework dedicated solely to genetics and counseling. In Connecticut and around the country, genetic counselors work in a wide range of clinical care, academic, laboratory, research, outreach, and biotechnology settings. With each scientific breakthrough, genetic counselors bridge the gap between research and clinical application. In other words, genetic counselors are the voice of genetic advancements, communicating about genetics in a language that patients can understand. The state recently invited Jackson Laboratories to build a genomics research center in Farmington. As genetic research continues to expand in our state, genetic counselors will continue to be an important part of the infrastructure.

Recognition of the professional status of genetic counselors is important for public protection, to help ensure that patients know when they are being counseled by a genetic counselor and when they are not. It is also important that any legislation that seeks to set forth a genetic counselor scope of practice be unique and reflects our specialized training.

While I appreciate the work that the Public Health Committee has done, senate bill number 370 does not accurately define genetic counselors nor does it reflect how they do their jobs. In fact, I believe it would restrict genetic counselors from working in the state of Connecticut. Enacting this bill would limit patient access to appropriate health care, and I do not support it.

Moving forward, I hope that genetic counselors can continue to work with you and the Department of Public health in submitting a request to evaluate the scope of our practice, through Public Act 11-209.

Selected References:

- CT OLR Research Report 1/10/12, 2012-R-0004: <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2012/rpt/pdf/2012-R-0004.pdf>
- National Society of Genetic Counselors document on scope of practice: http://www.nsgc.org/client_files/SOP_final_0607.pdf
- UnitedHealth, Center for Health Reform & Modernization: Personalized Medicine: Trends and prospects for the new science of genetic testing and molecular diagnostics. Working Paper 7, March 2012.